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ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS TO THE KINDERGARTEN.

(Prepared in the Kindergarten Division, Bureau of Education, in cooperation with the International Kindergarten Union.)

NOTE.—The objections quoted here have been urged against the kindergarten from time to time, chiefly by persons who have no clear conception of the place which the kindergarten holds to-day in relation to education, or whose opinions are largely the result of prejudice and second-hand judgment, and not of intelligent and personal observation of this form of child training.

1. *"Many primary teachers say that kindergarten children are hard to manage; they prefer to receive children fresh from home."*

ANSWER. To say that many primary teachers find kindergarten children "hard to manage" and that they prefer children without kindergarten training would indicate that primary teachers are interested chiefly in the management of children rather than in their development, which should not be true. A teacher who depends for the establishment of formal discipline on the sense of awe and separation which characterizes children fresh from home will naturally have little sympathy with the child from the kindergarten, nor will her criticism have much weight with any intelligent student of childhood or education, since it discloses a weakness not in the system but in her. The primary teacher who does not want kindergarten children is the one who fails to understand and practice the principle of self-activity in education. If she confounds order with passivity and self-expression with license, she will have difficulty with children from the *best* kindergartens.

In some instances the criticism is due to inadequate kindergarten practice. There may be kindergartners who do not represent the ideal, as there are teachers in all grades who fall below the best educational standards. When the kindergartner has the wrong conception of freedom, permitting the formation of habits of disobedience to definite commands, of discourtesy and excitability, kindergarten children are harder to "manage."

The kindergarten child who has received from his kindergarten training what it is designed to give him and what in the vast majority of cases he does get, goes into the primary room with senses keen and alert, skill of eye and hand, power of attention, habit of obedience, and ability and practice in self-expression. That he will demand more of his teacher because of all this is a foregone conclusion; but if her aim is that of modern education, she will rejoice in what he has gained through his kindergarten experience.

Modern psychology and hygiene agree in emphasizing the importance of freedom of thought and action at the kindergarten age.

2. "*Children do not learn anything in kindergarten; it is a waste of time; they do nothing but play.*"

ANSWER. The testimony of primary teachers and supervising officers gives specific denial to this statement. Experiments and tests carried on in several cities tend to show conclusively that the kindergarten child has the advantage over the nonkindergarten child in definite information about nature, human activities, and number facts, as well as in power to attend, to recollect, and to react quickly and accurately to a given situation. The extent of this training is obscured by the failure of the primary school to make definite use of it. This is due in part to the lack of any real coordination between the two departments and in part to the fact that in many school systems the kindergarten children form a minority of those in the first grade.

There are still many persons who limit all learning to the knowledge acquired from the printed page. They fail to understand that *ideas* are necessary in order to interpret the printed page. Ideas are gained through the senses, our first teachers. The open eye, the listening ear, the awakened mind are the results of the rich and varied experiences of the kindergarten. The technique of reading and writing, which belongs to a later stage of development, is of small value without the informing mind.

That all learning in the kindergarten starts with play is the basic principle of its founder. Play is the dominant instinct during the years of early childhood. Time spent in the development of that activity which is natural to any given period can not be characterized as wasted, since one period forms the basis of development for the next period. The child who plays vigorously, whole-heartedly, becomes the man who works vigorously, whole-heartedly. Therefore, it may be said with all possible emphasis that children *do* play in kindergarten because they *should* play; that it is not a waste of time, because it is play directed along lines that help to form in the child's mind interest in and right attitudes toward the experiences of life which he meets.

The modern school, realizing the educative value of play, is utilizing it more and more in the form of "organized games, toy making, or other construction based on play motives as part of the regular curriculum."

3. *"The kindergarten makes children nervous; they want to be doing something different all the time, or else be entertained."*

ANSWER: If such conditions result from kindergarten training they should be charged to special cases, or to the individual teacher, and not to the system. Should the kindergarten prove overstimulating or exhausting to a child a physician's advice should be sought in his particular case. The good kindergarten controls and directs nerve energy. One of its aims is the gradual gain of power of application. Through the happy cooperation of hand and mind it tends to form habits of attention and concentration.

The kindergarten in which the teacher does not dominate, in which the children make many of their own problems, and are allowed freedom in their solution, in which initiative and self-reliance are developed, will be free from the dangers of individual capriciousness, and the children will acquire ability to amuse themselves, skill in handling material, and a power of self-control which prevents nervousness and peevishness.

4. *"At 4 or 5 years of age children should be nothing but healthy little animals; it is time enough to chain them to desks and books when they are 6, or better still, 7, years old."*

ANSWER: The child who is only an animal at the age of 4 or 5 does not give good promise of a man made in the image of God. At no period of a child's life is he "nothing but a healthy little animal." In considering what should be done with him at any period it is quite as important to recognize his ultimate destiny as it is to consider his animal heredity. One can be overstrained quite as much as the other; the kindergarten holds that balanced view which gives due attention to the demands of his physical needs without ignoring the hints of a higher life which lie in his spontaneous activity. The kindergarten agrees wholly with the view that children should not be chained to desks and books at 6 years of age. Not only does it permit great freedom of movement in its own sphere, using neither desks nor books, but its example and spirit are developing freedom from cramping desks in primary rooms everywhere.

5. *"The kindergarten is an indoor institution in spite of its name; I want my children to be out of doors as much as possible."*

ANSWER: The name kindergarten is misunderstood by many to mean an actual garden where children play. What the name really means is a place where children receive care suited to their nature, as a good gardener gives care to plants. It is not a garden for children, but a garden of children. Its name does not necessarily imply

outdoor existence. Nevertheless, Froebel recognized, as do his followers, that a maximum of out-door life is important for little children and that real contact with plants and animals, such as is only possible out of doors, is a vital element in child life. Kindergartners everywhere strive, in spite of the difficulties of climate and popular objections to exposure, to have their children out of doors a great deal. An increasing number of kindergartners each year are endeavoring to stimulate this life by adding playground apparatus, by excursions, and by holding many kindergarten activities in the open air whenever weather conditions permit.

6. *"It is all very well for 'slum' children, but where a child has a good home and wholesome surroundings he does not need to be sent to school before primary age."*

ANSWER: Children are children wherever they are. There are homes in which the conditions are so ideal that kindergarten is not essential; but these homes are rare, even among the well-to-do. Every child needs social contact with other children of the same age as a means of developing social qualities, sociability, self-control, cooperation, and a measure of self-sacrifice. "The best preparation for working together is playing together, and we must at all periods live together," is an excellent statement of the needs of all children for the contact with other children on a plane of equality of interests and experiences which a kindergarten gives.

The guidance of a trained teacher, the presentation of educative materials according to an organized and developing plan, the stimulation of other individuals leading to healthy emulation; all these are elements not present in the majority of homes. Moreover, the best kindergarten conditions are hygienically better—with larger rooms, better ventilation, and greater opportunity for large, vigorous movements.